DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 008 HE 017 869

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TITLE The Decision to Go On-Line: A Survey of Advance Registration Practices of Selected Colleges and Universities in the Southwest.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 21p.; Charts may be marginally legible due to small or broken print.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Advising; College Administration; *Computer Oriented Programs; Geographic Regions; Higher Education; *Online Systems; Questionnaires; *School Registration; School Surveys
IDENTIFIERS *Computer Assisted Scheduling; United States (Southwest)

ABSTRACT

The advantages of implementing an advance registration system and specifically the benefits of being on-line were studied in order to help Arkansas Tech University in long-range planning. Questionnaires were completed by 66 colleges and universities in Mississippi, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. One of the most significant findings was that advance registration and on-line registration improved the academic advising program for the institution through relieving faculty from clerical tasks in the registration process and so creating an environment for an improved system of assisting students with course selection and career objectives. A total of 80 percent of the responding schools had an advance registration process of some type. Academic advising was required as a prerequisite for entering the registration process. Of schools presently having an advance registration process, 57 percent had an on-line system. About 89 percent of the institutions with preregistration systems on-line allow students to request specific class sections. Thirteen advantages of advance on-line registration systems are identified. The study questionnaire and a list of surveyed schools are appended. (SW)

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Arkansas Tech University
Office of Institutional Research

ED251008

THE DECISION TO GO ON-LINE: A SURVEY OF ADVANCE REGISTRATION PRACTICES OF SELECTED COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE SOUTHWEST

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THE DECISION TO GO ON-LINE:
A SURVEY OF ADVANCE REGISTRATION PRACTICES OF SELECTED COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE SOUTHWEST

The question of the need for and advantages of advance or pre-registration had been discussed for years. A recently completed long-range planning process for Arkansas Tech University recommended a movement toward advance registration along with several related items such as improved academic advising and computerized registration. This study was designed to assist the administration of a mid-sized public university to make determinations about the desire to implement these ideas suggested in the planning process.

Problem: What are the advantages of implementing an advance registration system and further, how would it be improved by being on-line? What have other colleges and universities found in similar situations and what are the advantages of an on-line registration system over the conventional manual registration system?

Methodology: The Office of Institutional Research designed a questionnaire which was sent to ninety-six (96) colleges and universities in the states of Mississippi, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. Sixty-six schools returned the questionnaires for a 69 percent response rate.

Significance of Study: One of the most significant findings of the study was that advance registration and on-line registration both improved the academic advising program for the institution. This was accomplished by the relieving of faculty from clerical tasks in the registration process and creating an environment for an improved system of assisting students with course selection and career objectives.

A total of 80 percent of the responding schools had an advance registration process of some type. Academic advising was required as a pre-requisite for entering the registration process. All schools not presently having a pre-registration process have plans to develop a program in the future. Of those schools presently having an advance registration process, 57 percent have an on-line system. Approximately 89 percent of the institutions with pre-registration systems on-line have systems which allow students to request specific class sections. This is important to the personalized attention that many institutions hold as important for students.

Advantages of advance registration systems which are on-line at the institutions included in the survey are as follows:

1. A better determination of course demands can be made.
2. Improved planning can take place in academic administration.
3. Adjustments in course loads and class schedules are more easily and quickly made than a manual system.
4. The system provides for more "up-to-date" information.
5. The flow of the registration process is smoother.
6. Utilization of faculty and staff is more productive.
7. Registration takes place over a more elongated period which distributes the work load.
8. Tuition and fees are collected earlier by the institution.
9. Error rate is decreased in data entry.
10. Student moral is improved.
11. Students are given more "personalized" service.
12. Time is reduced for students in the registration process.
13. Overall, the student retention rate is increased.

THE DECISION TO GO ON-LINE:
A SURVEY OF ADVANCE REGISTRATION PRACTICES OF SELECTED COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE SOUTHWEST

The Arkansas Tech Long-Range Plan (1982), addresses the problems of advising and registration in the section entitled, "Orientation, Academic Advising, and Registration" (pp. 36-41). As part of the recommendations for specific improvements in these areas, the LRP suggests:

> Academic advising be eliminated as a mere step in the classification process and established as a prior condition necessary for classification.
>
> The academic advising of continuing students take place in the departments prior to classification. After completing advising, students will be issued a "permit to classify" card by their advisors along with their classification schedule.
>
> Procedures for acquiring, maintaining, and locating information about the academic ability and performance of continuing ATU students be improved.
>
> On-line computerized pre-classification be implemented as soon as possible.

As a preliminary step toward implementing these suggested recommendations, the Office of Institutional Research at Arkansas Tech University sought to collect information on what other schools were doing about pre-registration. It was felt that such a study would provide a broad view of current practices as well as the practical advantages and disadvantages of each system.

A questionnaire was devised and sent to ninety-six (96) colleges and universities in the surrounding states of Mississippi, Missouri,

Louisiana, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas. Sixty-six (66) schools returned questionnaires (See Appendix) for a 69 percent response rate.

The results were tabulated according to institutional enrollment to determine if size made a significant difference in the responses and to more clearly define the practices of schools approximating the size of Tech. Enrollment figures for each institution were obtained from the 1981-82 Education Directory of Colleges and Universities.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The following chart summarizes the overall responses to the questionnaire.

CHART A

SURVEY RESPONSE TOTALS

QUESTION	Total No. of Institutions Responding	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
Question #4: Do you have an advance registration (pre-registration) process of any type?	66	53	13	3	80 percent of the responding schools have an advance registration process of some type.
Question #5 If no, have you ever had an advance registration process?	66	2	11	53	85 percent of those not presently having a pre-registration process have ever had one.
Question #7 If you do not have an advance registration process, do you have plans to develop one?	66	13	0	53	100 percent of those not presently having a pre-registration process have plans to develop a program in the future.
Question #8 If you have advance registration presently, is it on-line?	66	10a	22b	13	57 percent of those presently having an advance process are on-line.
	a) 2 institutions of the 10 reported "partial" on-line. b) 3 institutions reporting "no" will be on-line by 1983.				
Question #12 Do students request specific class sections in your registrations?	66	59	0	7	89 percent have students make specific requests. Several schools have the student also stipulate an alternative

Eighty percent (53 of the 66 schools) responding indicated they had some form of advance registration. Thirteen indicated no advance process but all thirteen schools which gave negative answers indicated they have plans to develop an advance registration process in the future. Eleven of these thirteen schools have never had any form of advance registration. The other two indicated they had previously had an advance registration system but had abandoned it for the following reasons:

1. 18 years ago--system was not versatile enough--not well planned.

2. 50 percent of the students changed their schedules (drop/add) or became no-shows.

Both schools were among those indicating future plans for advance registration. One of the most often cited disadvantages by those currently having pre-registration is the abundance of schedule changes. The institution which gave this as a reason for dropping its former program now feels the current advantages outweigh the former disadvantages.

Thirty of the fifty-three schools (57 percent) having some form of advance process reported being on-line. Two of the thirty reported "on-line" but indicated they were only partially on-line at the present time. In addition, 3 of the schools answering "no" to Question 8 indicated they would be on-line by 1983.

Question 12 asked if students requested specific class sections in the respondents' registrations. Fifty-nine responded in the affirmative. Of those fifty-nine, 52 had advance registration and 7 did not. Of the seven schools not answering question 12, one had an advance process and six did not. At all thirty of the schools reporting on-line registration, the students asked for specific class sections. Several schools also had students stipulate alternatives to their specific class section requests.

There could be limitations inherent in analyzing the data according to enrollment due to the difference of numbers responding in each enrollment

category. However, it would appear that an analysis of the data by enrollment indicates few significant differences from the over-all findings (see Chart B).

CHART B

ENROLLMENT RESPONSE TOTALS

QUESTION	Total No of Institutions Responding	YES	NO	N/A	COMMENTS
Question #4: Do you have an advance registration (pre-registration) process of any type?	Under 4500	12	3	0	80 percent "yes"
	4500-9900	27	5	0	84 percent "yes"
	10,000-15,000	9	2	0	82 percent "yes"
	Over 15,000	5	3	0	63 percent "yes"
Question #5 If no, have you ever had an advance registration process?	Under 4500	1	2	12	33 percent had previous system.
	4500-9900	1	4	27	20 percent had previous system.
	10,000-15,000	0	2	9	
	Over 15,000	0	3	5	
Question #7 If you do not have an advance registration process, do you have plans to develop one?	Under 4500	3	0	12	100 percent plan to develop.
	4500-9900	5	0	27	100 percent plan to develop.
	10,000-15,000	2	0	9	100 percent plan to develop.
	Over 15,000	3	0	5	100 percent plan to develop.
Question #8 If you have advance registration presently, is it on-line? a) 2-partially b) 1-will be 1983	Under 4500	5a	6b	4	45 percent "yes"
	4500-9900	18	9b	5	67 percent "yes"
	10,000-15,000	5	4	2	56 percent "yes"
	Over 15,000	2	4b	2	33 percent "yes"
Question #12 Do students request specific class sections in your registrations?	Under 4500	13	0	2	87 percent "do"
	4500-9900	29	0	3	91 percent "do"
	10,000-15,000	10	0	1	91 percent "do"
	Over 15,000	7	0	1	88 percent "do"

In the last part of the questionnaire, the schools were asked to list the advantages and disadvantages of their specific advance registration programs. Since this information is nonmetric or qualitative data, an exact analysis is difficult. An attempt was made, however, to tabulate the frequency of similar statements to see if there were outstanding advantages or disadvantages which could be identified. The results of this tabulation are given in the following table. The frequency of each statement is given in the parentheses after each statement.

ADVANTAGES

Staff and General Administration

- Better determination of course demands. (17)
- Allows for better planning. (10)
- Allows adjustments in course loads and class schedules. (7)
- More "up-to-date" information. (7)
- Smoothes the flow of registration. (7)
- Better utility of faculty and staff. (4)
- Spreads registration over an elongated period. (4)
- Earlier collection of tuition and fees. (3)
- Decreases error rate in data entry. (1)

Students

- Better student morale. (19)
- More "personalized" service to students. (8)
- Reduces time. (6)
- Helps retention rate. (3)

DISADVANTAGES

Staff and General Administration

- Increased the number of drop/adds. (18)
- Increased the number of changes and cancellations. (6)
  (especially Spring to Fall semesters)
- Need more staff/advisor time. (5)
- The system is not on-line and needs to be. (3)
- Not enough planning during the development stage. (3)
- Some increase in cost. (2)

Students

- Takes place while classes are being held. (1)

The most frequently given advantage for Staff and General Administration was some form of statement concerning "better determination of course load" (17) or "better planning" (10). Both of these statements deal with efficiency and effectiveness of management. Although the highest rated advantage for Students was "better student morale," (19) the other three given (more personalized service, reduced time, and helps retention rate) would seem to add to student morale.

A significant statistic concerning the disadvantages was the number of schools (9) who voluntarily commented that there were no appreciable disadvantages to advance registration. One, in fact, commented they "could not do without it." This statistic is even more significant when the list of disadvantages is considered.

The most frequently listed disadvantages were "increased the number of drop/adds" (18) and "increased the number of changes and cancellations" (6). These two categories are very similar but were treated separately to try to differentiate between "drop/adds" and other forms of more permanent disengagement such as no shows. These problems were especially found between the Spring and Fall semesters. Even though this problem seems to be inherent in any pre-registration process, several schools felt there were ways to limit the total number to an acceptable level.

Most felt that the drop/add numbers could be curtailed if: (1) the pre-registration process occurred over an elongated span of time, (2) there was a conscientious effort to do quality advising, and (3) there was no drop/add period immediately following the registration period. If a drop/add period is allowed immediately following registration, students are not forced to make life and death decisions concerning schedule selections but, rather, just enroll then go through drop/add as many times as needed to get their "real" schedule.

The desire for a more meaningful academic advising function is identified as a priority item in the LRP. Each fall, approximately 35-38 percent of ATU's previous year's enrollment do not return to school. At least one author (Tinto, 1982) indicates that a student's decision to withdraw is significantly affected by the degree of their intellectual and social

integration into the life of the institution. If advisors were given the time and opportunity to make a more conscientious effort to do quality advising, the student/advisor relationship would most certainly be strengthened. This improvement might help to reduce the current student attrition rate. In addition, the improved quality of advising would help curtail the number of drop/adds.

Of course, there will always be some changes due to events such as students enrolling before the present semester's final grades are posted, an unforeseen reduction in financial resources, and simply having a change of mind. It was interesting to note that even though there were several disadvantages cited, 53 of the 66 schools had some form of pre-registration and the remaining 13 were all planning future advance registrations of some type, indicating that the advantages derived from an advance registration process must be worth whatever disadvantages occur.

FOLLOW-UP STUDY

The results of the initial study led to additional questions concerning the drop/add policies at schools with advance registration. These questions prompted a second (follow-up) questionnaire to five of the participating schools approximately the size of Arkansas Tech University. All five schools returned the second survey.

The purpose of the follow-up survey was twofold. First, the study sought to determine what kind of institutional policies schools had for dropping classes. The second purpose was to identify any significant differences in the number of drop/adds which might be linked to specific institutional policies.

To provide a basis for comparison, a count was made of the Fall and Spring semester drop/adds at ATU during the 1981-82 school year. An informal count, done by the Office of Academic Affairs during the 1981-82 Fall semester, estimated that an average of 35-37 drop/adds were done per school day between the time school began in August and November 3rd, the last day

to drop with a "W". The actual count confirmed this estimate:

Actual Count

Fall 1981	1962	
Spring 1982	1536	
Total:	3498	drop/adds

In the second study, all five schools had some form of advance registration and all were on-line. A comparison of their drop/adds to their enrollments revealed that three of the five had significantly lower ratios than ATU. College A is much larger than Tech and College C had a recent personnel change that left them without adequate records with which to make a valid comparison. Their numbers were estimates made by the new administrator.

CHART C

	ENROLLMENT	9 MO. DROP/ADDS	DROP/ADD ENROLLMENT RATIO
College A	15,137	18,000	1.19
College B	4,013	2,000	.50
College C	1,059	1,559	1.47
College D	4,006	3,000	.75
College E	1,342	700	.52
ATU	3,255	3,498	1.07

An analysis of the other questions revealed that the range of school days a student has to add classes varies from 5 to 10 days at the different institutions. The overall feeling was that charging an increased fee had

no effect on the number of drop/adds. Two of the schools made no charge for dropping or adding a class. The other three charged from $1.00 to $5.00 per transaction. Two of the schools had experimented with this fee to determine if charging more would act to reduce the number of transactions. Both schools indicated the amount charged made very little difference.

The role of the advisor was evident in both parts of the study. In the initial study, several of the schools commented they do not allow the student to advance register until a release in the form of a card or signature is obtained from the advisor. This release is only obtained after the student has made an appointment and discussed the projected schedule with the advisor.

In the second study, the respondents also indicated that a student must have the advisor's approval to drop or add a class. Having the approval of the advisor for both the pre-registration and drop/adds procedure emphasizes the importance for the student and advisor to work closely together. Through the experience and expertise of the advisor, the student can avoid many of the problems which may occur simply through the inexperience of the student. Obviously this procedure does not eliminate all mistakes, but it does eliminate some evidenced by the smaller drop/add-enrollment ratios.

CONCLUSIONS

The study was initiated to determine if the recommendations for specific improvements stated in the ATU Long-Range Plan (1982, pp 36-41), were realistic and feasible. The results of the study not only support these recommendations, they also provide additional information that can be used to better facilitate the implementation of the recommendations.

The first two recommendations deal with the role of academic advising. The study provided evidence that the key to an effective preregistration program was quality academic advising. Advising was done in the advisor's

office, at the institutions surveyed, prior to classification. Since this process occurred early in the semester, at the convenience of both advisor and student, there was no haste or critical time limit for the process. After this process was completed, the student was issued some form of "permit to classify" and could finish the procedure anytime. This procedure, including the advisor's signature, appeared to be a critical part of the advance registration process.

The third recommendation addressed by this study deals with the "procedures for acquiring, maintaining, and locating information about the academic ability and performance of continuing ATU students". This recommendation also involves the fourth which states that on-line preclassification be implemented. These recommendations were also strongly supported by the findings of the study.

Fifty-seven percent of the schools having a pre-registration system reported being "on-line". In addition, several others were working toward this end. One of the advantages of being on-line, obviously, is to have immediate, up-to-date data immediately available on each student. Therefore, it would seem that having an advance registration process would not be as effective without being on-line.

In conclusion, the findings of the study fully support the recommendations made by the Planning Committees. The recommendations are not only realistic and feasible for ATU, they would, also, help improve and update the system to better serve the needs of students, faculty, and administration.

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Broyles, S.G., & Davis, G.C. Education Directory Colleges and Universities 1981-82. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1981.

Tinto, Vincent. Limits of Theory and Practice in Student Attrition. The Journal of Higher Education, November/December 1982, 53 (6) 687-700.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONS TAKING PART
IN THE STUDY

LOUISIANA

Grambling University, Grambling, Louisiana 71245
Louisiana State University in Shreveport, 8515 Youree Drive, Shreveport, Louisiana 71115
Louisiana Tech University, P.O. Box 4874 Tech Station, Ruston, Louisiana 71272
McNeese State University, Lake Charles, Louisiana 70609
Nicholls State University, University Station, Thibodaux, Louisiana 70301
Northeast Louisiana University, 700 University Ave., Monroe, Louisiana 71209
Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches, Louisiana 71457
Southwestern Louisiana University, 100 West Dakota, Hammond, Louisiana 70401
Tulane University of Louisiana, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118
University of New Orleans, Lake Front, New Orleans, Louisiana 70122
University of Southwestern Louisiana, E. University Avenue, Lafayette, Louisiana 70504

MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, Mississippi 39762
Mississippi University for Women, Columbus, Mississippi 39701
University of Mississippi, University, Mississippi 38677

MISSOURI

Central Missouri State University, Warrensburg, Missouri 64093
Missouri Southern State College, Joplin, Missouri 64801
Missouri Western State College, 4525 Downs Drive, St. Joseph, Missouri 64507
Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, Missouri 64468
Southeast Missouri State University, 900 Normal, Cape Girardeau, Missouri 63701
Southwest Missouri State University, 901 South National, Springfield, Missouri 65802
University of Missouri-Columbia, Columbia, Missouri 65201
Washington University, Saint Louis, Missouri 63130
Webster College, 470 East Lockwood, Saint Louis, Missouri 63119

OKLAHOMA

Central State University, 100 N. University Drive, Edmond, Oklahoma 73034
East Central Oklahoma State University, Ada, Oklahoma 74820
Northeastern Oklahoma State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma 74464
Oral Roberts University, 7777 South Lewis, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74171
Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Durant, Oklahoma 74701
Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford, Oklahoma 73096
University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus, 660 Parrington Oval, Norman, Oklahoma 73069
University of Tulsa, 600 South College, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74104

TENNESSEE

Austin Peay State University, College Street, Clarksville, Tennessee 37040
Christian Brothers College, 650 East Parkway South, Memphis, Tennessee 38104
David Lipscomb College, Nashville, Tennessee 37203
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 37601
Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37130
Shelby State Community College, P.O. Box 40568, Memphis, Tennessee 38104
Southwestern at Memphis, 2000 North Parkway, Memphis, Tennessee 38112
Tennessee State University, 3500 Centennial Blvd., Nashville, Tennessee 37203
Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tennessee 38501
University of Tennessee at Knoxville, Knoxville, Tennessee 37916
University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, Tennessee 37204
Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee 37240

TEXAS

Abilene Christian University, Abilene, Texas 79601
Amarillo College, P.O. Box 447, Amarillo, Texas 79178
Baylor University, Waco, Texas 76703
East Texas State University, Commerce, Texas 75428
Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas 77710
Lee College, Box 818, Baytown, Texas 77520
Midwestern State University, 3400 Taft Blvd., Wichita Falls, Texas 76308
North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203
Pan American University, 1201 West University, Edinburg, Texas 78539
Rice University, P.O. Box 1892, Houston, Texas 77001
Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas 75275
Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas 78666
Stephen F. Austin State University, 1936 North Street, Nacogdoches, Texas 75962
Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas 79830

Texas A & I University, Santa Gertrudis, Kingsville, Texas 78363
Texas A & M University-Main Campus, College Station, Texas 77843
Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas 76129
Texas Woman's University, T W U Station, Denton, Texas 76204
University of Houston at Clear Lake City, 2700 Bay Area Boulevard, Houston, Texas 77058
University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas 76019
University of Texas at Dallas, P.O. Box 668, Richardson, Texas 75080
University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas 78285
West Texas State University, Canyon, Texas 79016

APPENDIX B

ADDENDUM TO ADVANCE REGISTRATION QUESTIONNAIRE OF ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Person completing questionnaire _____

Name of institution _____

1. How long after the first day of classes does a student have to add classes? (Give in number of days)

2. What is your institutional policy on dropping classes? Give complete details.

3. Do you charge for adding and/or dropping classes? Yes___ No___
If yes, how much?

4. How many adds and drops did you process during the 1981-82 academic year? _____
(This should be for 9 months)
Has this number drastically changed over the past few years? Yes___ No___
If so, why?

5. Other comments

Return completed questionnaire to:

Dr. M. Olin Cook, Executive Vice President
Arkansas Tech University
Russellville, Arkansas 72801

QUESTIONNAIRE RELATED TO ADVANCED REGISTRATION

1. *Name of Institution* _____

2. *Name and title of person completing questionnaire* _____

_____

3. *Telephone number of person completing questionnaire* _____

4. *Do you have an advance registration (pre-registration) process of any type?*

Yes *No*

5. *If no, have you ever had an advance registration process?* *Yes* *No*

6. *If answer to 5 is yes, why did you drop advance registration?* _____

_____

7. *If you do not have an advance registration process, do you have plans to develop one?* *Yes* *No*

8. *If you have advance registration presently, is it on-line?* *Yes* *No*

9. *What are the advantages of your advance registration system?* _____

_____

10. *What are the disadvantages of your advance registration system?* _____

_____

11. *Briefly describe your registration process.* _____

_____

_____

_____

12. *Do students request specific class sections in your registration?* *Yes* *No*

13. *Name and telephone number of person to call if more information is needed.*

_____

14. *If you have an advance registration process, please send any materials or forms which would be helpful in gaining an understanding of the process.*

Return to Dr. M. Olin Cook, Executive Vice President, Arkansas Tech University, Admin. #202, Russellville, AR 72801